

CLASS CONFLICT IN THE TERMS OF CASTE IN MULK RAJ ANAND'S NOVEL UNTOUCHABLE

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ABSTRACT

This paper aim is to bring some improvement or amelioration in the conditions of life of the poor masses of the country who are Untouchable. Anand's Novel is a scathing critique of the oppressive caste system. He launches this critique through series of events that take place in the life of an untouchable man. Even something considered as seemingly minor incident like accident brush with a man from higher caste is enough for Bakha to be verbally assaulted by mob. Anand describes a range of scenarios that effectively highlight how every single aspect of an 'untouchable' person's life is affected by the rigid hierarchies of the caste system. Untouchable is essentially a tragic poem of individual caught in the net of the age –old caste system.

KEYWORDS: Scathing Critique, Untouchable, Oppression, Orthodoxy & Eradication

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INTRODUCTION

Mulk Raj Anand is a broadly acclaimed novelist, he rose to prominence along with his Maiden novel "Untouchable" constituting the shouts of the lower groups of individuals. Effect of Mahatma Gandhi. It's an archetypal book coping with the worst wicked of Indian culture. Bakha, the protagonist of this book is an untouchable coming in the bottom strata of Indian culture. The Choice of a personality like the publication is a potent indictment about the caste decimation and hypocrisy, particularly Brahmins. The publication Untouchable deals together with the issue of caste and poverty, squalor and backwardness and ignorance and superstition. Untouchability since the 'Best blot of Hinduism', the untouchable is actually the Harijani, 'The Man of God' is quite encouraging. He feels impressed and hopeful if he sees about the modern sanitary method of flush that may get rid of the blot of Untouchability and provides the dignity of standing of these as guys.

DISCUSSIONS

Untouchable tells us the story of Bakha who is an eighteen year old, strong able-bodied boy and who has to lead a hard life because of his extreme poverty. He is the son of Lakha (the Jemadar of all the sweepers in the town and cantonment area). Bakha's main duty is to clean the three rows of public latrines in the mornings and evenings. The novel describes Bakha's experiences in the course of one particular day. These experiences are mostly of the unpleasant and even shocking nature, though a couple of his experiences on the same day have the effect of cheering him up and arousing some kind of hope in his heart about the future. Bakha's main grievance against the caste Hindus arises from the fact that regard him as an "Untouchable" and that any touch by a sweeper or a scavenger like himself makes them think that they have been "polluted" and must take a bath in order to feel clean once again. The first real shock, is which he receives on that day results from

having accidentally touched a Hindu business man (an upper caste Hindu Brahmin) walking through a street of the town. The Hindu businessman raises an alarm and rebukes Bakha sternly for having “polluted” him. The businessman then slaps Bakha, shouts and abuses; “WY don’t (YOU) call, you swine, do you know you have touched and defiled me, cock eyed son of a bow-legged scorpion! Now I will have to go and take a bath to purify myself, and it was a new Dhoti and Shirt and I have put on this morning”. Bakha joined hands for an apology but the man goes on:..... “Dirty dog! Son of a bitch! Off spring of a pig!’ He shouted, his temper spluttering on his tongue and obstructing his speech and the sense behind it, in its mad rush outwards. ‘I’.....I’ll have to go –o-o-..... and get washed –d-d-d I.....I was going to business and nownow, on account of you, I’ll be late”. Bakha feels deeply ashamed and distressed by the thought that he is an “Untouchable”. The shouting man attracts the crowd, which gathers to know the reason behind all this fuss. When the man sees that people are gathering, he continues his denunciation with much enthusiasm. Bakha on the other hand does not know what to do, he is confused. Anand explains his mental state in the following words: “His first impulse was to run, just to shoot across the throng, away, away and far away from the torment. But then he realized that he was surrounded by a barrier, not a physical barrier, because one push from his hefty shoulders would have been enough to unbalance the skeleton-like bodies of the on lookers. But a moral one. He knew that contact with him, if he pushed through, would defile a great many more of these men. And he could already hear in his ears the abuse that he would thus draw on himself.” The condition of Bakha and the surrounding crowd not only encourages the shouting man, but also others in the crowd. One of the urchins from the crowd takes this opportunity and falsely accuses Bakha of beating them. Bakha protests against this false accusation and tries to seek forgiveness of the crime, he is presently being charged for. But his attempts are futile, as no one in the crowd believes him. Anand observes: “He was really sorry and tried hard to convey his repentance to his tormentors. But the barrier of space that the crowd had placed between themselves and him seemed to prevent his feeling from getting across. And he stood still while they raged and fumed and sneered in fury; ‘Careless, irresponsible swine! ‘They don’t want to work’ ‘They laze about!’ ‘They ought to be wiped-off the surface of the earth!’” The shouting man gets further infuriated, when a Muslim tongawallah sympathizes with Bakha, and comes to his rescue. When he was slapped and humiliated by upper caste Hindu. Tongawallah consoled Bakha who being a Muhammadan and thus also an untouchable from the orthodox Hindu point of view, shared the outcastes’ resentment to a certain degree at another level. Later Bakha thinks about the situation and broods: “Why was all this fuss? Why was I so humble? I could have struck him! And to think that I was so eager to come to the town this morning. Why didn’t I shout to warn the people of my approach! That comes to not looking after one’s work. I should have begun to sweep the thoroughfare. I should have seen the high-caste people in the street. That man! That he should have hit me! My poor jelabis! I should have eaten them. But why couldn’t I say something? Couldn’t I have joined my hands to him and then gone away. The slap on my face! The coward!” Bakha is aware of both his status and the growing sense of protest in his mind. He says: “The cruel crowd! All of them abused, abused, abused. Why are we always abused? The sentry inspector that abused my father. They always abuse us. Because we are sweepers. Because we touch dung. They hate dung. I hate it too. That’s why they don’t touch us, the high-castes,” Bakha thinks about the sympathy of tongawallah and immediately becomes conscious of the effect that the word ‘Untouchable’ has on him. “The tongawallah was kind. He made me weep telling me, in that way, to take my things and walk along. But he is a Muhammadan. They don’t mind touching us, the Muhammadans and the Sahibs. It is only the Hindus and the outcastes who are not sweepers.

and Bakha Says:

"For them I am a sweeper, sweeper

untouchable! Untouchable!

Untouchable! That's the word!

Untouchable! I am an untouchable."

The repetition of the word "untouchable" in these lines convey's Bakha's anguish and anger regarding the slap which he receives from the high-caste man. This quote is significant because in addition to evoking class struggle theme, it also depicts an eureka moment for Bakha. In this moment his struggle realizes that to be an untouchable in Indian society is to be a second class- citizen. Then followed similar other incidents each of which meant more degradation for Bakha. The only two incidents, which to some extent, consoled and cheered Bakha, were his meeting with Christian missionary Hutchinson, and his listening to a speech by Mahatma Gandhi and the comment made upon the Mahatma's view by a young Hindu poet, Iqbal Nath Sarshar. According to them Untouchability can be eradicated by the flush-system. Sarshar says, *"Well, we must destroy caste, we must destroy the inequalities of birth and the unalterable vocations. We must recognize an equality of rights privileges, and opportunities, for everyone. The legal and social basis of caste having been broken down by the British Indian panel-code, which recognizes the rights of every man before a court, caste is now mainly governed by profession. When the sweepers change their profession, they will no longer remain Untouchable. And they can do that soon, for the first thing we will do when we accept the machine will be to introduce the machine which dear's dung without any one to handle it- the flush system. Then the sweepers can be free from the stigma of Untouchability and assume the dignity of status that is their right as useful members of a caste less and classless society."* Bakha has worked in British regiments for sometime after watching the life of white-man he has become obsessed with the idea of living like white people. But at the same time he is also aware of the fact that they are white and therefore he has tried to copy them as much as possible in his Indian limitedness. His father does not like the idea of his extravagance and he is also been teased by out-caste boys for his eccentric dressing. They call him 'PIL PALI Sahib" Bakha too is aware of the fact that only his clothes are English and apart from that there is nothing English in his life. His father greets him in the morning with abuse as he still is in his bed. He gets angry at the abuse as he was already depressed that morning his heart fills with hatred and dislike for his father and then he remembers his mother, (Maha Lakshmi) who was loving and warm he remembers the hot tea and glass of milk that his mother used to give. The memory of the taste of that hot liquid make's him desire it. Though Bakha is a sweeper, a latrine cleaner, he remains clean and neat unlike other scavenger who cannot think of anything else other than to remain dirty and unclean. Bakha has an intelligent look about him; he is also a sensitive person by nature! Bakha impresses Charat Singh with his efficiency and quickness of job. Haval-Daar Charat Singh gave him a hockey stick as a gift, Bakha feels honored at this gesture from one of the best player of the regiment. Bakha realizes that his long cherished desire is about to be full filled he bows to the Havaldaar and goes back to his work. When he is about to complete the third row, he feels a kind of cramp because of bent over poster and he stretches a little to ease his pain. By the time he finishes the job, he feels completely exhausted. But, he knows that he has to go on to his next job. Now Bakha goes to the town to substitute his father as a street sweeper as his father is not feeling well. Anand castigates Hindu caste system and the evil designs of the privileged class to think that only they can enjoy the basic amenities of life. The more distressing experience was when a crowd of worshippers in a temple began to reprimand him severely because they believe that his presence close to images of their gods and goddesses has "polluted" the whole temple. The well episode in this novel is a vital

evidence for understanding that social problems of the Dalit or subaltern society because of their sub alternity they were compelled to live in dirt, dusty, filth, thirst. The lower caste people were so poor to have their own wells. As Anand narrates: *“the out castes were not allowed to mount the platform surrounding the well, because if they were ever to draw water from it. The Hindu of three upper castes would consider the water polluted. Nor were they allowed access to the nearby brook as their use of it would contaminate the stream”*. While filling the pitcher from the village well pandit Kali Nath kept an evil eye on Sohni (Bakha’s sister) and he invites her to clean his house where he tries to molest her and when she resists. Pandit began to cry *“polluted polluted!”* The cunning and shrewed priest has not only molested Bakha’s sister but also accused Bakha of having polluted the premises of the temple in order to gain the sympathy of the crowd. Here, Anand shows the hypocrisy pretence and shame of the Hindu society when two persons are begging food at the doorstep of a house, one is Sadhu or a holy man who is treated with full devotion because his blessings will benefit them, and on the other hand an untouchable. Bakha is begging for food but he is treated with contempt and abuses, as the lady of the house says in anger: *“you eater of your masters.....you have defiled my house! Go! Get up, why didn’t you shout if you wanted food? You have defiled my religion! Now I will have to sprinkle holy water (Ganga Jal) all over the house.”* The third painful experience for Bakha on that day was a Hindu house-wife throwing a chapatti towards him from the top story of her house and he picked up the chapatti from the dusty pavement on which it had fallen. This food (Chapatti) is what he gets after having shouted outside every Hindu household the word’s are;

“Bread for the sweeper, mother,

Bread for the sweeper”,

After this incident, he becomes acutely aware of his being as an untouchable. His plight as untouchable is highlighted by his announcement *“Posh, Posh, sweeper coming”*. With his awareness of his being untouchable. A sense of anger also grows in his mind. He start’s thinking that why he was treated in such a humiliated and abusive manner and why do not Shaibs and Muslims have any problem in touching him. The author is actually highlighting the cruelty of Hindus in comparing them to Muslim and Christians. Bakha is uncertain and confused about explaining things to his father. He knows not whether he should tell to his father about things happened to him and his sister. His father shouts at him and calls him *“good for nothing”*. To add to Bakha’s misery is fact that his own father has not been particularly considerate to words him. At the end, Bakha is left with three possible solutions: firstly to become a Christian and escape from the caste taboos, secondly Gandhi’s eradication of untouchability and thirdly the mechanized sanitation as a remedy for social evil. As a novelists addressing him to the tasks of exposing certain evils. Anand has been as effective almost as *“Dickenson himself”*. Anand primarily deals with the misery and wretchedness of the poor and their struggle for better life. He has always been conscious of the need to help and raise the untouchable the peasants, the serfs, the Coolies and other suppressed member of human society, to human dignity and self awareness in view of the object-ness apathy and despair in which they have sunk. According to Saros Cawasjee; *“Anand is deeply concerned with social problems and that he is committed to the eradication of the evil which infest modern society. Is this deplorable aim of an artist? As untouchable is propaganda because it reveals the exploitation of the poor by the rich? Propaganda is a term given currency by the bourgeois critic and loosely used in India to captain any work where the author’s intention is plain”*. In these novels, Anand describes that discrimination done on the basis of caste and class. The social discrimination is done on the basis of caste and class. The social discrimination generates social tensions and disturbs the cultural balance of society. It is callous and inhuman. The novel Untouchable opens with a description of the outcaste colony. They were living without any

facilities, since thousands of years. Their colony is portrayed, thus is the novel. The out caste was the lowest stratum of Indian society suffers at the hands of high caste of Hindus. The novel evokes in the mind of the objective reader the horrifying social malady that existed in the colonial days and in the subsequent decades and creates a tale of socially manipulated woe to the down trodden in the Indian society. The novelist has presented the picture of pre-independence India with rare power of realism and he has become very successful in presenting the graphic and vivid portrayal of Indian society. There can be, no doubt, then, that Anand has a definite social and moral aim in the writing of the novel's Anand does not believe that an artist should live in an ivory tower and should indulge in fanciful dreams about the joys and delights of human existence. Anand is no believer in art for "art's sake" he is a believer in using art as a vehicle for the advancement and progress of human society.

The novel "untouchable" ends on a positive note of hope that someday untouchability will be completely eradicated from the society of India with this hope, the novel also provides their possible solutions for the eradication of untouchability. Firstly to become a Christian and escape from the caste taboos, secondly Gandhi's eradication of untouchability and thirdly the mechanized sanitation as a remedy for social evil. The picture of society presented to us is that of an orthodox and especially Brahmin's. These hypocrite Brahmin's are actually worst, as is presented by Pundit Kali Nath, who tries to molest Sohini. The plight of Sohini is worst then that of Bakha, as she suffers being an untouchable and also being a woman. With the realistic depiction of untouchables in the novel, Anand questions the basic assumptions on which the practice of untouchability is based in Hindu community. Bakha's rebellious nature also hints towards the movements against the untouchability which were gaining force during the 1920's of Indian history.

THEME OF THE NOVEL

The theme of this novel is untouchability, a social evil which has been the bane of Hindu society for ages and centuries. This evil is fully and vividly brought out by Anand in this novel through the experiences, in the course of the single day, of a sweeper-boy by the name of Bakha. This novel was evidently written with a specific purpose which was to create public opinion against the evil of untouchability. Thus Anand had a clearly-defined, humanitarian motive in writing this novel. In this respect, this novel reminds us of the novels of Charles Dickens who also wrote with the specific purpose of creating a strong public opinion against some of the social evils afflicting English society of his time. Much has already been done for the sweeper and the scavengers in India but much more needs to be done because untouchability as a social evil has not yet been eradicated. The majority of castes Hindus still think a sweeper's touch to be something which pollutes them. At the same time, it must be recognized that, although very little has yet been achieved in this direction, the sweepers and scavengers have already become arrogant towards their employers, whether the employers are the Municipal Corporations or private individuals like house-holders. While it is essential that the caste Hindus should shed their immemorial prejudices against the sweepers and scavengers, the sweepers should not lose their heads and become aggressive towards their employers. Already, we are witnessing the sad spectacle of the sweepers and scavengers becoming absolutely indifferent to their duties of sweeping the roads and the streets, not to speak of cleaning the latrines where the flush system has not yet made its appearance. Already, the streets and lanes of the cities and towns have become filthy because of the dirt and the rubbish which accumulate there owing to the neglect by the sweepers and scavengers of their duties even when they continue to receive their full wages, and even though many additional facilities and benefits have been provided to them. Much of the sympathy, that we are likely to feel for the sweepers and scavengers in the course of our reading of this novel, would be neutralized by the growing indifference of this class of workers to their work and to their duties.

Bakha in this novel dreamed of dressing like a *sahib*. Today we find that almost every sweeper of the younger generation dresses himself like a *sahib*, while the women sweepers assume offensive airs of importance while working in homes and in the streets. We must maintain a balance between work and privilege not only in respect of the upper classes but also of the economically backward classes of society. *Untouchable* is a somber novel with a serious message for the readers. But, it does have some come touches to relieve the gloom of the story. One of the most striking merits of this novel is its realism. There is hardly anything in this novel which is fare-fetched or fanciful. Every detail has its basis in reality. Every detail is factual. Indeed, the realism of this novel reminds us of the French naturalistic novel as initiated by Emile Zola. This situations most convincing but the characters too correspond to the facts of Indian life. The sweetmeat-seller throwing the paper-bag containing jalebis towards Bakha, the temple priest's trying to seduce Sohini and then crying "polluted, polluted" in sheer frustration, the injured boy's mother abusing Bakha for having touched her son and refusing even to listen to what actually had happened, a housewife's giving alms to a *sadhu* and asking for a cure for her son's fever-these are all true to the facts of life. We have in this novel what we may aptly describe as stark or naked realism. We have wholly unvarnished accounts of actions, deeds, thoughts, motives, feelings, and desires. *Untouchable* is by no means a profound novel, though it is a valuable record of an important phase in the history of Indian society and its progress towards the goals of secularism and equality of rights and opportunities for the country's entire population. There is no philosophy or metaphysics in this novel, apart from a fleeting reference by Mahatma Gandhi to the possibility of re-incarnation, and an equally fleeting reference to *nirvana* by Iqbal Nath Sarashar. The novel is not politically significant or important either. But, as a social document with a message to the Indian Hindus, it occupies an honoured position in the literature of the twentieth century.

CONCLUSIONS

The protagonist of this novel suffers because of his caste. In this novel, Bakha is presented as a universal figure to show the oppression, injustice, humiliation to the whole community of the out castes in India. Bakha symbolizes the exploitation and oppression which has been the fate of untouchable like him. Premila Paul remarks; the novel, indeed, presents Anands' attempt at distilling a social metaphor which takes in its sweep a whole range of postulates of Hindus culture. It is a kind of dialectal work centered on as exploration of the possibilities of achieving synthesis or spiritual restoration. In protesting against the evil of untouchability, Anand does not directly address his readers or preach them the lessons of tolerance and liberalism in dealing with the out-casts of society. He only depicts the misery-wretchedness, and the suffering of sweeper-boy called Bakha, it is not merely untouchability which makes Bakha miserable but also the destitution. Thus, untouchability and penury go hand-in-hand. These two evils are the cancer-eating into the happiness of large numbers of people in this country. Suresh Nath's Says about "untouchable" *Suresh Nath reminds us that untouchable have poured like a hot lava from the volcano of Anand's "crazed imagination," was rejected by nineteen publishers because of too much misery, evil, and degradation in it, even though it had been recommended to them by the scholars like Bonamy Dobree and Maurice Brown. The novel became acceptable to a publisher only after E. M Forster had written a preface to it. Forster had praised Anand's novel for its directness of attack upon the evil which is the subject of the story. Forster also frankly pointed out the fact that Indians "have involved a hideous nightmare unknown to the west: the belief that the products are ritually unclean as well as physically unpleasant, and that those who carry them away or otherwise help to dispose of them are out cast from society. Really it takes the human mind to evolve anything to devilish. No animal could have hit upon it". K. N Sinha's reaction to untouchable, "Untouchable has the immediacy of the truth voice of feeling. It reflects fully the image of decadent society, and conveys the sense of deeply felt like. Anand shows complete understanding the human*

situation and a sensitive discrimination of moral values. *Untouchable* is essentially a tragic point of the individual caught in the net of the age – old cast – system. At the same time, the novel has tragic beauty of its own. The will to revolt and the sheer impossibility of successfully doing so under the circumstances constitute the basic tension in the novel. The hero is simultaneously a rebel and a victim. His anguish becomes our anguish; his sorrows become our sorrows. But Bakha has no tragic status other than his status as a scapegoat and a victim, tyrannized by a recalcitrant”. **Following words of Mulk Raj Anand are note worthy**, “All these heroes, as the other men and women who had emerged in my novels and short stories, were dear to me, because they were the reflection of the real people I had known during my childhood and youth., and I was only repaying the debt of gratitude I owed them for my much of the inspiration they had given me to mature into manhood. When I began to interpret their lives in my writings. They were not mere phantoms, though my imagination did a great deal to transform them”.

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